

Communion Preparatory Service

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[0 : 00] If you turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of Luke in chapter 7, we read together this evening. A quite wonderful passage from verse 36 that's entitled, A Sinful Woman Forgiven.

At the end of the passage we read in verse 50, Jesus parting words to this unnamed woman who has shown such incredible courage in what she has just done and coming into that home of the Pharisee, unannounced, uninvited, unwelcome, and yet there showing her devotion to Christ in such an open and moving way, Jesus said to her in verse 50, Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.

Your faith has saved you. Go in peace. Well, I want to think with you this evening for a short time together about this passage.

Let us first of all just bow in prayer for a moment together. Gracious Lord, we thank you that we gather around the Gospel of Jesus, your Son. We thank you that he came into this world, the Good Shepherd, to seek and to save the lost, to gather in his flock scattered, and for so long had been shepherdless and scavenged and oppressed.

There had grown up in Israel at this time a heaviness of heart under a leadership that taught salvation by segregation.

[1 : 36] We bless you that Christ exposed that as false hope. And tonight in this passage in Luke where we see this woman whose name we don't know, who came into that gathering and expressed openly her devotion to Christ, her love for Christ.

May her example speak to us tonight. May above all the Holy Spirit lead us. And may we tonight see Jesus. In his name we ask it. Amen.

Well, it's a wonderful incident here in the Gospel of Luke in chapter 7 where the Lord is being constantly criticized. The enmity is growing.

There's animosity in the air. There's accusation and finger-pointing and chest-poking. The leadership are now being stirred in their opposition to Jesus.

And that's the interesting thing here. One of the Pharisees, one of the leading rulers of the day, when a man of standing and authority and influence and reputation, a man outwardly, one of the most religious men on earth, is here inviting Jesus to eat with him.

[2 : 49] It's a bit of an unexpected turn of events, but events take a far greater turn of unexpectedness as we follow through the passage. I want to just think of a few things with you this evening.

First of all, to just say as an opener, as you know, worship is first and foremost an act of the heart. And that's what we find here.

An act of the heart being lived out and expressed regardless of those around her, regardless of the consequences of the judgment she would face and the hardness of heart that would come against her.

She had something to do. She doesn't speak. She says nothing in this incident. And yet, in her conduct, we see devotion.

We see worship. This is one of the most personal episodes of worship in the New Testament. It's described for us here. It's a very moving scene. And it's moving because of the contrast that's at its very heart.

[3 : 50] This man is outwardly religious. He's got it all. He's sorted. He's fixed. He's okay. He's going to glory. That's the prevailing mindset of the day. He was a Pharisee.

Therefore, he was an expert in the law. He was steeped in Scripture and tradition. They knew their Bibles, these guys. And we mustn't forget that about them. It's just that as they read the Bible, something failed to transmit into how they conducted themselves.

And it was a real hardness of heart, a real oppressiveness. Impressiveness. But because of their status as Pharisees, they were their influence, standing, and they had leadership.

People deferred to them. They had a voice. They had an input into direction of travel and all that was going on culturally and of any significance in the nation. And in sharp contrast to that, we have this woman who is outwardly the opposite end of the scale.

She has nothing. She has no standing. She is not welcome here. She is shunned. And the great contrast is in what's happened in their hearts.

[5 : 00] And we'll see that all being well as we reflect on this this evening. Simon's heart is hard as flint. This woman's heart is broken. Simon thinks he's made.

This woman knows she needs forgiveness. Simon thinks that religiously he can do no wrong. This woman has grown up and become convinced that she can do no right.

And Simon is of the mind that she can do no right. And so there's this real contrast here. Simon the Pharisee asks Jesus to his home.

This is quite clear. But as Jesus engages with him and begins to expose this hardness of heart, we see in him that there was no sincerity in the invitation. There was no humility.

There was no warmth. See how Jesus begins to talk with him and draw out his own heart. Verse 44. When I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet.

[6 : 06] 45. You gave me no kiss. Verse 46. You have not anointed my head with oil. There was no heart to this man's invitation to Jesus to come into his home.

The woman, this unnamed woman, is the opposite. And Jesus said, Simon, this woman has wet my feet with her tears.

She has dried my feet with her hair. She has not stopped to kiss my feet since I came in to your home. And the beautiful aroma now filling this house is from the anointment that she has put on my feet.

Here is a heart bursting with desire for Jesus. And the question is, is that why we're here tonight? Surely it is.

It must be. For worship is first and foremost an act of the heart. Yes, we're here to conduct a preparatory service. That's an expression of what we want to know most of all, and that is a closeness with Jesus Christ.

[7 : 12] And so we're here to worship the Lord. We're here to grow in grace. We're here to feed and receive from the Holy Spirit nourishment, teaching, leading, so that our spiritual vitality would be nourished and sparked and deepened that little bit more, that we would have that resolve in this psalm that we sang of already in Psalm 138.

I do like one quote here from John Calvin, a great reformer, who did so much to systematize the thought of the Protestant church as it emerged in the darkness of uncertainty as to how to practice true religion, how to conduct the affairs of a church.

He wrote that worship is the undoubted foundation of righteousness. But then he went on to say, we must worship and adore as well as analyze and explain.

And that's where Simon and his like had gone so wrong. They were all for the analysis and the explanation and the rules and the regulations and the traditions.

But there was no adoration, no worship, no warmth. And that's the contrast between Simon, the supposed religious leader, and this woman who, as he says in his own words here in verse 39, what is he doing allowing her to touch him?

[8 : 39] If he was a prophet, he would know this woman is a sinner. So there's a lot of things going on here. There's a heart bursting with desire for Jesus. And at the other end of the table in the host and Simon, we see a heart that's hard as flint and is uncertain about Jesus.

He's questions and he's not sure if Jesus is going to make the mark or come up to the line or if he's going to actually get there at all. There's a lot of fuss about this preacher from Nazareth, this carpenter who has been crisscrossing the districts and his fame is growing, his popularity is off the charts.

And Simon thinking, I need to get some of this. I need to see what's going on here. But there's no devotion, no love, no worship. So let's think about this woman then in particular and think about a few things that we see in her conduct here.

First of all, we can say this, she came to the house that day because of what she heard. She came to the house that day because of what she heard.

That's all we're told. Verse 37, Behold, a woman of the city who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

[10 : 15] What is going on here? Well, at the time, the custom was that when religious men held a feast of this nature, it was an open invitation.

The understanding was if you wanted to listen to the great and the good, the theologians, the leaders discussing the finer points of the law and the Torah and the character of Moses, the Mosaic covenant and the Aaronic priesthood and other Levitical rites, well, you would just come and you would sit round the table, not partaking in the meal, but listening.

And that's what was happening. There's this coming and going. It's all that's going on. There's an open house, a lot of hubbub and noise. The Pharisee is clearly a well-off individual and he can host this large number and that's the host, of course, all eyes are on him.

He's at the top table. He's in the place of honor and prominence and he's holding court here in his house and well, he knows it. And then, out of nowhere, this uninvited woman, a known sinner in the town, appears.

Now, the thing is that we can say about her is this. She came because of what she heard. A woman of the city was a sinner when she learned he was reclining at table, brought an alabaster, flask of ointment and she went to that house.

[11 : 35] We don't know why she was allowed in. We don't know if she had to make an excuse or if she was questioned or challenged. All we know is that she went because of what she had heard.

And the wonderful thing is this. Nothing and no one would prevent her. Nothing and no one would keep her away. She went to that house because she had heard enough. And what's wonderful is we don't know what she'd heard.

We don't know where she had heard it. We don't know what interaction previously she had enjoyed with the Lord Jesus. But whatever it was, it was enough. Because when she heard that he was reclining at table in that house, she went.

She would not have gone to that house if Jesus was not there. But because the Lord was there, come what may, she would go to.

Because of what she had heard, she went. She knew that he was there. So there's this closeness. Because of what she heard, because of what she knew, they go together.

[12 : 42] She knew Jesus was there. And that was enough for her. She was going. And Jesus is there in that house being disrespected, being dishonored, being questioned, being looked at in suspicion and hardness of heart.

And in contrast, she displays loving devotion. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping. She was in the presence of the Lord, and this for her was enough.

This is what she wanted more than anything. Now, she was content because she was with Jesus. But such is her devotion. Such is the condition of her heart.

Such is the gratitude. Such is the spirit of worship. Such is her love. She can't contain herself, and the weeping begins. And the tears flow. And she doesn't care.

Everybody else does. There's probably a sharp intake of breath the moment she appeared. There's probably a stunned silence at the head of the table where Simon was.

[13 : 48] There's probably muttering and sighs and noise and sounds of disbelief. They knew who she was. That seems to be quite clear. She was perhaps well known.

She was someone whose profession probably went before her. And that's why Simon is so dismissive. And yet, she's there to what?

To worship. Can I read to you what A.W. Tozer, a very prominent American preacher and writer, said about worship. He said this, that the greatest tragedy in the world today is that God has made man in his image to worship him, made him to play the harp of worship before the face of God day and night, but man has failed God and dropped the harp.

It lies voiceless at his feet. And that's what we see in Simon, a hardness, a refusal to worship. The harp of worship has been laid aside.

But then in comes this woman and she picks up that harp and she begins to play the harp of worship and the tears flow. She can't hold them back.

[15 : 03] She can't contain herself and she's not bothered in the least and she just lets these tears go. This then is someone who has come to express devotion and worship.

She's not come to hear a sermon. She's not come to listen to the theologians nitpicking about the Mosaic law and the Aaronic priesthood and the Levitical rites and the wonder and splendor of the temple.

None of it. She's not come there for religious practices and liturgy and systems. She's come for the Savior. to be with Jesus.

What had she heard? We don't know. When she learned he was reclining at table she went. What did she think would happen?

Well I believe that she believed that when she came to that house and came to Jesus he would accept her and he would welcome her.

[16 : 04] That he would deal with her in a way that no one had ever dealt with her before. He was a man of God. He was a preacher who had somehow previously it would seem touched her heart and connected with her soul in a way that no one had ever done before.

And when she heard he was there it was for her to now come in response. To come to that house. To accept the shame and the mocking and the embarrassment and the disdain and the disregard and the abject sense of probably dislike if not perhaps hatred might be saying too much but Simon and his like they didn't want her there.

Remember their belief was salvation by segregation. You don't engage with sinners. They are beyond the pale. We don't want to know them and neither does God and the Son of God said that is not why I've come.

I've come to seek and to save the lost and here's one of them. So she came because of what she heard because of what she knew. She also came we can say this because of how she felt.

Because of how she felt. And that's quite obvious in what happened when she got there. She made her way through into the house. The style of the house at the time was probably an open court something perhaps even like this perhaps even with an overhanging veranda.

[17 : 34] There may well have been a gallery with people looking down listening being so impressed by the theologians and all they had to say and there's this teacher from Nazareth at the other end of the table.

The famous man the man around whom there was a real buzz a real attraction because there was power. There was power in the Lord that there was absent and all these other itinerant preachers and Pharisees and scribes and Sadducees there was a drawing there was an attractiveness there was something loving and lovely and awesome about this man and they came to him in their droves which is what the Pharisees couldn't understand.

He is the friend of sinners. He's a glutton a drunkard. Look at the verse there in verse 34 in the passage just before the one we read. The son of man has come eating and drinking and you say look at him a glutton and a drunkard a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

how right they were and this sinner knew in Christ she had the greatest friend and she came to that house because of how she felt driven by gratitude infused by grace determined what?

To honour Jesus determined to express her love for him determined to side with him determined to show some form of gratitude in her worship.

[18 : 56] Maybe she didn't know what she was going to do but before she knew it walking through that crowd knowing every eye in the house was on her and the muttering and the whispering and the backbiting all started around her the shocked and stunned silence the sense of horror from the Pharisee at the head of the table.

She made her way through that crowd soaking it all in and finally she came to the feet of Jesus and all she could do was weep and cry and it was as if literally a dam had burst there was no stopping it and so she came because of how she felt because up until this point every religious leader that she'd ever encountered had avoided her and shunned her and ostracised her and judged her and rejected her and told her to get away from them.

They would cross the road if they saw her coming. They wanted nothing to do with them and then she met with Jesus. Wonderful hymn of Horatius Bonner certainly comes to mind here.

Let me read to you this verse. I heard the voice of Jesus say come unto me and rest. Lay down thy weary one lay down thy head upon my breast. I came to Jesus as I was so weary worn and sad I found in him a resting place and he has made me glad.

and that's what we see in this woman. We don't know her name but we see her weeping at the feet of Christ wiping his feet with her hair kissing his feet and anointing them with ointment in gratitude devotion and love for how he has dealt with her.

[20 : 38] She found in him a resting place. She found in him forgiveness and a cleansing from sin the very thing that those around her had told her was impossible.

Now she finds that and experiences it in Jesus the weight of sin removed. Maybe you remember the wonderful imagery of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress when Pilgrim comes to the cross.

What happens to the burden in his back? The straps holding that burden to him begin to creak and crack and finally they split and the burden rolls off his back and bounces down the hill into the sepulcher never to be seen again.

The burden of sin the weight of sin removed and all she could do in her gratitude is honour and adore her Saviour.

Isn't that wonderful? Isn't that why we're here tonight? To honour and adore our Saviour to give thanks for him to express the gratitude that we know because we too have known our sins to be forgiven.

[21 : 43] That wonderful imagery in Isaiah in chapter 61. He has clothed me with the garments of salvation. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

Friends, that's how we approach the table tomorrow. Clothed with the garments of salvation and covered with the robe of righteousness. And is that not how we conduct ourselves not just to the table but day by day and week by week with gratitude to God for Christ that our sins would be forgiven?

How deep the Father's love for me of vast beyond all measure that he would send and make his only son and save a wretch and make me a treasure.

That transformation from being a wretch to being a treasure. it's a message of love at the very heart of this gospel and this is the saviour we have come this evening to worship and adore and honour.

And that woman went there too because nothing would hold her back. And so she broke the rules of the day. She was not interested in what the Pharisee might say. She accepted and expected a sense of rejection.

[23 : 01] Perhaps she expected not even to get in the door but she did. And then she finds herself at the feet of Jesus. And here in her conduct we see an amazing example of unashamed open love for Christ.

And there's joy here. There's peace here. Because she knows that in Christ finally she's found the Messiah. The saviour.

The promised one. And he has dealt with her in a way no one else did and no one else could. He dealt with her in such a way that the weight of her sin has been removed.

I think reading through this passage it seems that the forgiveness to get technical the forgiveness seems to have happened already and that awareness of forgiveness brings her to the feet of Jesus in this state of adoration and worship and love.

And now she receives from Christ these wonderful words of assurance your sins are forgiven your faith has saved you go in peace.

[24 : 11] The wonderful words of the gospel of grace. Friends you remember when you heard these words yourself and realised that Christ was speaking to you and that assurance and peace that flooded your heart and mind when you realised you too have been forgiven you too have met the saviour and what then filled your heart after that moment of repentance and faith love joy peace what else gratitude to God that in grace he has brought you from death to life from darkness to light from being an enemy to being one of his children thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ so she came here because of how she felt and the psalms help us very much in maybe just thinking about this a little bit more you know well the words of Psalm 32 blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven whose sin is covered blessed is the one against whom the Lord counts no iniquity and in whose spirit there is no deceit her sin has been covered and when this happens when we believe when we come in repentance and faith to Jesus it does not happen in a vacuum what happens at that moment is we take

Proverbs 3 verse 5 and we live it out trust in the Lord with all your heart lean not on your own understanding in all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths there's this this wonderful sense that in worship and in conversion it's God himself that deals with us and so like her we come to the saviour to be saved and we know gratitude and we give thanks to God as we turn from sin and turn to Christ as we repent of sin and call out to Christ Lord from the depths to thee I cried my voice Lord do thou hear the testimony of every Christian here this evening that we made that plea for mercy and forgiveness and grace and that's what's happened because that's what Christ does when we come to him in sincerity of heart and plead that prayer of the New Testament Lord be merciful to me a sinner and that's what this woman has done somewhere along the line somewhere in the town somewhere

Jesus has met with her and dealt with her and now she here she's there he's back he's in the Pharisees home I'm going and nothing's going to keep me back and no one's going to get in my way and she brings probably the most precious possession she has a very expensive container of ointment that would have been a ransom worth of the day and she comes to Jesus because he has dealt with her and brought the weight of her sin from her and she will show her devotion regardless of what anyone might think so she came to honour and adore she came in obedience she came to follow and that is the life of the Christian the Christian man and woman it's all about striving and fighting and running and persevering and what do we do as we do these things we pray we rejoice we serve we honour we obey that's why we go to the table tomorrow God willing in simple humble obedience and adoration with an attitude of gratitude to say thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus

Christ we go there as forgiven sinners not to be forgiven we go there because we have been saved not to be saved we don't go there to receive the ministry of the church and the blessed sacrament that's made so through the minister or the office of ministry therefore setting us apart as we ingest the grace of God we go to partake by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me and this is something we feel this cannot happen in a vacuum we are not robots we are human beings and we don't leave our emotions at the door as we come into worship and adore perhaps especially so at communion time as we remember the death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Psalm 30 and verse 11 and 12 puts it this way you have turned for me my mourning into dancing you have loosed my sack cloth and clothed me with gladness that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent oh Lord my God

I will give thanks to you forever the woman we read of in Luke's gospel chapter 7 could have written these words you have turned for me my mourning into dancing you have loosed my sack cloth and clothed me with gladness but she's crying she's crying in gratitude to Christ who has dealt with her in love and mercy and grace and brought her from darkness and hopelessness to peace and hope in the gospel she feels it and she expresses it our emotions do not usher in salvation but as saved people there is expressed with joy and wonder and praise and adoration our gratitude to God for the salvation that we know in Christ so she came because of how she felt lastly this just to finish she came because she had nowhere else to go nowhere else every door was closed to her religious elites didn't want to know the local synagogue wouldn't touch her the

[30 : 15] Pharisees and the ruling council they didn't want to know this woman because she was a sinner what did Christ do Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners and so he deals with her he deals with this woman whose name we do not know and he turns her mourning into dancing and he turns her sackcloth into gladness and she returns that glory with praise and she says oh lord my god I will give thanks to you forever and that begins here in the house of Simon who didn't want to know her and the tears and the drying of the feet of Jesus with her hair and anointing with the ointment her guilt has been removed friends when Jesus deals with us he removes the guilt of her sin that we may walk in the newness of life and so we too are on a pilgrimage together looking to serve our lord and obey our lord and to get up our cross daily to follow him her actions spoke for her let our actions speak for us her conduct spoke for her she doesn't speak but her conduct speaks loudly and here two thousand years later her conduct continues to speak so let our conduct too speak for us Christian friends brothers and sisters let us be clear in our dealings in our conversations and how we conduct ourselves that we are the lord's and the lord is ours and that is a powerful powerful light shining in the darkness and how we see commitment gratitude love we see faith let the world to see these things in ours we don't know her name but she leaves as a wonderful example your faith has saved you go in peace said

Jesus go in peace to what go in peace into the world that will despise you but will ridicule you that will ignore you that will turn from you because you're mine but go in peace because I'll be with you and that's our promise tonight we anticipate the lord's table tomorrow in peace we anticipate the feast in peace because having been justified by faith we have peace with god through our lord Jesus Christ so tomorrow we will gather at the table to honor him and obey him do this in remembrance of me said the lord in a sense there's something in Wesley's hymn that should perhaps resonate with us tonight and tomorrow that when we think of the cost of our salvation that it cost our redeemer everything that Jesus went on from this house to Calvary and to the grave in order to pay a price we could not pay is not the case as Wesley said that we think about these things lost in wonder love and praise that our savior would give himself to this day and so he showed her love because she was one of his she went to that house to express devotion and leaders like Simon didn't know what to do they didn't know where to turn they were embarrassed they were they were ashamed and finally exposed this woman when

I entered your house you gave me no water for my feet but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair you gave me no kiss but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet where Simon is your heart this heart was closed to Christ and there we need to say therefore I tell you her sins which are many are forgiven for she loved much but he who is forgiven little loves little and he said to her your sins are forgiven that friend is how we come to the table tomorrow conscious that we go there in Christ because of Christ to remember Christ in obedience to Christ do this remembrance of me and so we go there not to partake in some right or formal ritual there's a structure there's an order there should be there must be but we go there ultimately to feed to be nourished to grow in grace to express our faith to say I am the

Lord's the Lord is mine I have come to him for forgiveness of sin and he has clothed me in a robe of righteousness and so I go to the table because of who he is and because of what he did for me Psalm 73 puts it this way whom have I in the heavens high but thee oh Lord alone and in the earth whom I desire besides thee there is none Christian friend at the table tomorrow that is a reality you express whom have I in the heavens high but thee oh Lord alone we go to the table and we look up we go to the table in remembrance we go to the table of peace to be fed to be nourished ready for the week to come and the next week and the next week as we remember the death of our Lord until he come again we go then to the table because of the good news of Jesus and his invitation in Isaiah in chapter 61 we had the language that we see being experienced here in Luke 7 where Jesus found this woman whose name we don't know but he found her poor broken-hearted captive and bound that's the language of Isaiah 61 and what did

Jesus do he brings the good news and in Jesus she experiences tenderness liberty freedom comfort gladness joy and praise Isaiah 61 it's all there Christian friend as we reflect tonight on this incredible incident and the grace and love of Christ the devotion of this woman being expressed so openly that her sins had been forgiven and she didn't know what else to do but come to Jesus in tears and anoint his feet and bow and worship and adore him let us do likewise and let our hearts be full of comfort and gladness and joy and praise and may the Lord bless our conduct and our conversation and our decision making that through these things the light of the gospel of grace would shine and men and women around us would see that Christ is ours and we are his I hope friends that there's encouragement for us all here this evening and that you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your own that you're trusting him with all your heart and that you've come to him for the forgiveness of sin that only Christ can forgive and having done so take your place at the table tomorrow remembering that the token in your pocket is one thing but Christ in your heart that's everything let's pray together Lord we thank you for your goodness to us for the wonderful incident recorded for us here in that house a religious man who as yet did not know the Lord who was unwilling to acknowledge the Lord and was full of uncertainty and questions and hardness of heart and that woman who came in how she changed the scene as she changed the atmosphere as she changed everything of that meal that day she wept uncontrollably at the feet of

[38 : 10] Jesus we see devotion and love and closeness and tenderness may these characteristics come to define us in days to come and may we be bright shining witnesses as we rely on you day by day hear us Lord we pray in Jesus name Amen well we'll close our service tonight we'll sing from the Psalter in Psalm 62 Psalm 62 singing from verse 5 and we'll sing to verse 8 page 294 in our blue psalm books Psalm 62 from verse 5 my soul wait thy with patience upon thy God alone on him dependeth all my hope and expectation he only my salvation is am I strong rock is he he only is my sure defense I shall not moved be Psalm 62 we'll sing from verse 5 to 8 to the praise of God my soul wait thou with patience upon thy God alone on him dependeth all my hope and expectation he only my salvation is he only my salvation is and my strong rock is he he only my sure defense I shall not move and be in God my glory blessed is and my salvation is my sure defense I shall not move and be in God my glory blessed is and my salvation my salvation sure in God the rock is of my strength my refuge full secure ye people place your confidence in him continually in him continually in him continually in him continually before him pour ye out your heart

God is our refuge may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all amen you you you you you you